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Flooding Can Cause Problems With Sewage Systems And Private Drinking Water Wells

Public Service Announcement



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Panama City, Fla. – The Florida Department of Health in Bay County is advising residents in Bay County that may experience heavy rains and potential flooding this week to take precautions. The following information offers a few simple recommendations that can help prevent illnesses during and after flooding. This is especially true for people on sewage systems or who have private wells that provide their drinking water.

General precautions:

- Do not let children play in flood waters as these waters may be contaminated by sewage.
- If you live in a low-lying or flood-prone area, the ground in your area may be saturated from heavy rainfalls or flooding. You should use household water as little as possible to prevent backups of sewage into your home

Sewage Systems:

You may experience difficulties with your sewage system not functioning properly. If you have a septic system that operates by a dosing pump, it will not function without electricity. You should refrain from using water in your home as much as possible until electricity is restored. Without the pump working, the tanks will fill and may cause backups of sewage in your home. Do not have a full septic tank pumped out as this may cause the tank to float out of the ground.

What should I do if sewage backs up?

- If a sewage backup has occurred in your home, stay out of affected areas and keep children away. If your entire home has been saturated, abandon the home until all affected areas, including but not limited to carpets, rugs, sheetrock, drywall, and baseboards, have been thoroughly cleaned and disinfected.
- If sewage has overflowed in open areas or streets, etc., avoid these areas and keep children out of these areas.
- If you are having problems in areas served by sewer systems, please contact your utility company to insure they are aware of problems in your area.

Private Wells:

Additionally, The Florida Department of Health in Bay County advises private well owners whose drinking water wells that are affected by flood waters to take precautions against disease-causing organisms that may make their water unsafe to drink.

One of the following methods is recommended as a precaution:

- Use bottled water, especially for mixing baby formula; or
- Boil water before use, holding it at rolling boil for at least one minute before using it for drinking, washing, cooking, etc.; or
- Disinfect water by adding 8 drops (about 1/8 tsp – this would form a puddle about the size of a dime) of plain unscented household bleach (4 to 6%) per gallon of water, and then let it stand for 30 minutes. If the water is cloudy after 30 minutes, repeat the procedure. Use a container that has a cap or cover for disinfecting and storing water to be used for drinking. This will prevent contamination.

After the flooding subsides:

- Disinfect your well using the procedures available from the Florida Department of Health in Bay County or provided by the Florida Department of Health at <http://www.floridahealth.gov/environmental-health/private-well-testing/index.html>; and
- Have your water tested by the Florida Department of Health in Bay County or by a laboratory certified by the State of Florida to perform drinking water analysis for coliform bacteria.
- Continue to use bottled/boiled/disinfected water until lab tests confirm that it is safe.

About the Florida Department of Health

The department, nationally accredited by the [Public Health Accreditation Board](#), works to protect, promote and improve the health of all people in Florida through integrated state, county and community efforts.

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